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PROPANE BUILDER

IN THIS ISSUE

GREEN BUILDING

RICHARD LAUGHLIN INTERVIEW

RAILROAD COMMISSION OF TEXAS

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GOING GREEN WITH PROPANE

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD LAUGHLIN

WHEN YOU FIRST BEGIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH A CLIENT, WHAT'S THEIR TOP OF MIND REGARDING PROPANE?

The main reason clients want propane is for comfort – heat. I'll give you a good example. Several years ago I did a remodel for my elderly grandmother and put in a heat pump. When I went back to check on her, she said it was the "coldest dang heat she had ever had." We changed to propane.

Clients also want propane for their stovetops. That is always a preference. More clients want an alternative to grid electricity when the power goes out and that is often a propane generator.

WHEN YOU DISCUSS PROPANE WITH CLIENTS, DO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ADVANTAGES OF PROPANE FIGURE IN THEIR DECISIONS ABOUT APPLIANCES?

I believe they will in the future, but they haven't in the past. I still need to get better educated about the environmental benefits of propane so I'll be better able to educate clients.



Photo courtesy of Laughlin Home & Restorations, Inc.

WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR PROPANE APPLIANCES YOU INSTALL FOR YOUR CLIENTS?

The most popular have been heating systems and stove-tops for cooking. Tankless water heaters have also become very popular, and I think this trend will continue. In the future I think we'll see a lot more buried propane tanks, too. People are always amazed that we can bury propane tanks. I think it takes away the stigma of having a tank in your yard.

DO YOU SEE ANY CHANGE IN THE USE OF PROPANE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

People will be more concerned about the green advantages, but saving money will continue to drive the use of propane. We build large homes, and operating costs actually drive the owners to look at propane. The environmental aspects will help them feel good about their choice. In larger homes, utility costs can often run as high as the mortgage, and in these cases propane is an easy choice.

Richard Laughlin, president of Laughlin Home & Restorations, Inc., is a third-generation builder who started his home construction business in the Fredericksburg area more than 20 years ago. He builds high-end homes using new and salvaged materials that "capture the essence of old-world charm while maintaining modern-day elements." His homes have received many awards and have been featured in magazines such as *Southern Living*, *Town & Country*, *Country Living* and *Texas Farm & Ranch*.

GREEN INCENTIVES FOR GREENER HOMES

BUILDING WITH PROPANE OFFERS CASH AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

If propane had a color, it would be green—as in good-for-the-environment green, and good for sales to environmentally conscious consumers. A recent study comparing home heating fuels showed that propane and natural gas furnaces are the lowest emitters of greenhouse gases, beating electric heat pumps and fuel-oil and electric furnaces.



Photo courtesy of Rinnai Corporation

Choosing a propane water heater, especially a tankless model, also increases the green quotient in homes more than electric alternatives do. Propane water heaters cut emissions of greenhouse gases by 60 percent compared to similar electric units. In fact, building codes in several cities, including Austin, prohibit the use of electric resistance water heaters when propane or natural gas is available. As of January 1, 2009, propane tankless water heaters nationwide will be eligible for the EPA Energy Star rating and qualify for a \$300 federal tax credit when replacing an older electric or propane tank-type water heater after that date.

Propane water heaters cut emissions of greenhouse gases by 60 percent compared to similar electric units.

Other propane appliances, such as grills, spa and pool heaters and standby generators, are also environmentally friendly and provide the homes you build with green selling features. Propane grills emit significantly less smog-producing compounds and particulates than charcoal with lighter fluid. And propane standby generators are quiet and ultra-low emission compared to their gasoline or diesel counterparts.

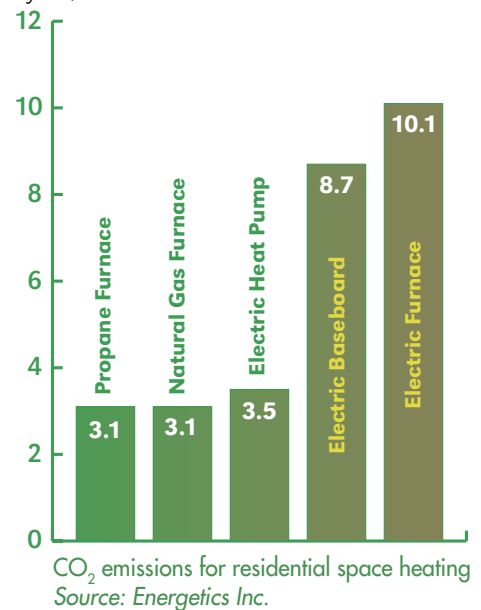
Vent-free gas logs are up to 99 percent efficient, adding warmth and beauty to homes. Fireplaces rank second among the top features desired by new homebuyers, behind outdoor entertaining spaces. According to the National Association of Homebuilders, the master bedroom is the most desired room to add a second fireplace or stove. Propane gas logs can add instant romance with the flick of the remote, and they don't leave behind messy ashes or odor.

Building green with propane means comfort and luxury without the sticker shock. Gas-fired tankless water heaters produce higher flow rates than electric ones, allowing your homebuyers to multi-task with a single unit. Propane grills heat up faster than charcoal, so you can go from heat up to "Eat up!" in less than 30 minutes. And propane home generators automatically flip on when the power goes out, ensuring that refrigerators, computers, security systems and key appliances can keep operating until grid power is restored, whether you're home or away.

And propane is a Texas clean-air fuel. Our state is number one in production, storage and use of propane. Ninety percent of the propane used in the U.S. is domestically produced, and propane is an approved alternative fuel recognized by the federal Clean Air Act and the federal Energy Policy Act of 2005.

Best of all, in Texas, propane appliances in new construction qualify for rebates through the Railroad Commission's Consumer Rebate program. Each year, the Commission offers \$1 million in consumer rebates.

Builders of spec homes are eligible to claim the rebates, which are targeted to appliances that save energy and improve air quality. For more information, visit www.propane.tx.gov.



RESIDENTIAL REBATE PROGRAM

\$1 MILLION IN REBATES AVAILABLE ANNUALLY



Duke McDowell, Sterling Custom Homes, has received numerous Railroad Commission rebates for installing tankless water heaters in the propane-fueled homes he builds.

DO PROPANE TANKLESS WATER HEATERS QUALIFY FOR REBATES?

Yes. Tankless water heaters receive the same rebates as standard water heaters under the Railroad Commission's Propane Appliance Consumer Rebate Program. Each year, the Commission offers \$1 million in consumer rebates. Builders of spec homes are eligible to claim the rebate.

CURRENT REBATES

\$200	Installation of propane water heater in a new construction
\$350	Replacement of electric water heater with propane water heater
\$600	Propane Star Home
\$800	Propane SuperStar Home

NOTE: Builders may apply for one or more individual propane water heater rebates for a single property, but may not combine a water heater rebate with a Star Home or SuperStar Home rebate on the same property.

For more information about rebates visit www.propane.tx.gov or contact Eileen Latham at (512) 475-2911 or eileen.latham@rrc.state.tx.us.

PROPANE BUILDER

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